



# NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners  
Issue 6 December 2023



**Waterways at risk**  
**Climate change blamed**  
**for flood damage**  
**Keep Anderton Boat**  
**Lift alive**



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# NABO News

The magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners

**Issue 6 December 2023**



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Articles, letters, photos and cartoons are most welcome. Please email your contributions to [nabonews@nabo.org.uk](mailto:nabonews@nabo.org.uk) or post to the Editor by January 13 2024.

## Cover photo

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This month's cover is a seasonal first heavy frost at Gnosall, photo by Sharon Wells. Please email your photos for the front cover of NABO News to the Editor, as JPEG attachments, ideally portrait format with a file size of 2MB or larger.



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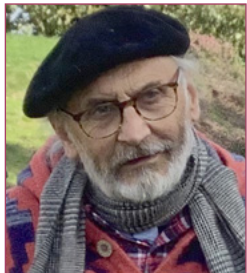
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“Every movement that seeks to enslave a community needs a minority group to use as a scapegoat, which it can blame for its distress and use as a justification of its own dictatorial powers.”

Although in its original form the quote was about Soviet Russia, America and Nazi Germany, I can see an analogy to CRT creating a scapegoat of continuous cruisers, who are not to blame for the deterioration of the network. The use of dictatorial powers is not the way to improve the situation.

## First they came for the continuous cruisers

Editor **John Sadler** on the inequity of CRT's current funding model

Defra has only done what it was always intended to do under changes initiated by (now) Lord David Cameron to eliminate Quangos. In my opinion all it has achieved is to create a new Quasi Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisation, just not government funded or accountable for its actions.

I'm not CRT bashing but I am critical of the model it's based on. NABO has always believed that the charity model, à la National Trust, was not suitable for the canal network. It's not possible to fence it off and charge admission which is the first problem. The high maintenance costs require more income than the users contribute. It's easier to generate funds for a specific defined project like a fish bypass or canoe portage point than it is to raise money for routine maintenance. Give money to make life better by water is not very convincing if you are struggling to feed your family and heat your home.

### Where do we go from here?

Whilst we may have criticisms of the way existing funds have been spent, CRT need more money to keep the canal network navigable.

As the setup originally required Government input, so will rescuing the resultant demise. NABO is not capable of influencing Government, we are too small and would be ignored, especially with so much activity on the world stage and an economic crisis at home.

Even the efforts of Fund Britain's Waterways will hardly sway government policy. The great restoration work achieved by volunteer groups of the reconstruction of canals is also under threat.

Some quite reasonable responses have been on the agendas of many of the boating organisations, but CRT believe at least in the legality of their position with no amendment. Increase the income from boaters. So the organisation that was set up to preserve the future of the canal network and its surrounding history looks more likely to oversee its demolition, whilst preserving its own existence.

In the short term Defra needs to help financially, which will require pressure from ministers to loosen the purse strings a little.

In order to generate interest at government level we need tens of thousands of people to contact MPs then, especially in an election year, we might be able to generate some support where it really matters.

All it takes for a despicable plan to succeed is for good men and women to do nothing. Write or email, talk to your friends get them to write, put a message in your Christmas card or make a New Years resolution. We need to take action to keep our canals open.

Best wishes for the forthcoming festive season, John Sadler.

**A**fter too many years as your Chair, and with an excellent Council team in place, I felt this was the time to stand down, although I am happy to continue as a Council member, especially given the situation with EA and my role on the Boat Safety Scheme's Technical Committee.

The latter is especially important, given the generation of standards for the increasing use of AC on boats, as well as all the dangers related to the introduction of lithium batteries.

Without any shadow of doubt, it has been a great privilege to be NABO's chair, not only because of the challenging issues that we have had to face, but also because of the wonderful folk who have been, and still are, members of the Council – who really do all the work, especially my Vice Chair, Anne Husar. We've never yet had to deal with an issue where no-one has offered to take responsibility.

But what a situation faces all of us boaters right now, given the horrendous issues resulting from the government's (reduced) funding of CRT, and of all the other waterways operators, especially the EA. The current crisis for CRT goes right back to Prime Minister David Cameron's decision in the noughties, to get rid of the so-called "Quangos", and the vision that British Waterways could become the "National Trust for the Waterways". ("Quasi-government organisations" which he felt would be better run by non-government bodies, and which would then not require to be funded or run by a government department.) It's important to note that NABO, along with most boater representative bodies, said from the start that this would never be financially viable. The fundamental problem is that unlike National Trust properties where every visitor pays, most of those who benefit from

the waterways never contribute in any meaningful way to their upkeep and maintenance costs.

NABO recognised that this strategy would simply never work, and thus opposed it loudly but to no avail. Now we are once again having to say, very loudly, that CRT and the other waterway operators simply cannot (and indeed, should not have to) operate without any government support, given that they are largely unique national treasures of historical importance that benefit a high proportion of the population, most of whom contribute nothing to their upkeep, except (currently, but not for long, unless something changes) via their taxes.

## A question of money, or maybe attitude

Outgoing Chair **Mike Rodd** looks back on his time at the helm of NABO

Nevertheless, the outcome of this policy was for British Waterways to become the Canal and River Trust (CRT) and now, after the planned 15 year transition period, the Minister responsible is applying the long term aim of reducing CRT's government funding so that it will soon be down to zero.

A separate, but related issue is that we believe that CRT could make better use of the money that they do have. We have continually had to raise concerns about the way CRT is failing to maintain the canals, spending vast sums on silly blue signs, supporting non-waterways-related projects, employing poorly-managed contractors, etc.

CRT is here to stay, so we need to find the best way of helping it to focus more on the fundamental reason for its establishment, keeping our



amazing and unique canals and waterways in an acceptable condition. Thus the best thing for us is to be seen by CRT as a “critical friend” – with the emphasis on “friend”, whose voice should carry more weight in making operational decisions.

Because of this we saw a need to establish a national movement to work for better funding of our waterways, and were delighted to find that the IWA (Inland Waterways Association) was similarly motivated. So the “Fund Britain’s Waterways” campaign was established.

With over 100 organisations now on board, this initiative is being led by a small steering group with membership from NABO, IWA, AWCC, British Marine and the RYA, under the chairmanship of the well known and highly respected Les Etheridge, lately the National Chair of the IWA. With an initial campaign cruise in Birmingham with nearly 50 boats filling the canal, there was extensive press and media coverage, especially via the BBC and ITV, also by local radio stations, and then by several national newspapers, particularly the Guardian. This all helped to swell numbers signing the nationwide petition (please do sign it if you haven’t yet—[waterways.org.uk/fund-britains-waterways](http://waterways.org.uk/fund-britains-waterways)—and also brought the issue to the attention of MPs, etc. A follow-up event was held at Gloucester docks by an offshoot of FBW, “Fund Gloucester Docks”. The next event was another campaign cruise in November, this time to the Palace of Westminster, similar to the one in January 2007, which also sought to effect changes in Government policies. Thirty-one boats then played a crucial role in that venture, some of which agreed to be involved this time around.

At the same time as all this has been going on, NABO has been flab-

bergasted to see that CRT has chosen to raid one of its few identifiable revenue streams, namely us boaters, by imposing horrendous increases in licensing charges, mooring costs, etc over the next five years. This specifically includes escalating the licence fees for continuous cruisers, (despite our earlier legally supported objections), justified by using a very questionably structured “survey of boaters” to prove that this move is favoured by the majority of its licence holders. We have, of course, taken legal advice regarding the situation, but it does seem that without expensive additional legal action, we are unable to prevent CRT from going down their chosen route.

Boaters are clearly seen as soft targets, my fear is that these moves will drive many to leave the waterways, and may also cause others to simply disobey the requirements unless there is substantially increased monitoring and enforcement. It seems a perfect recipe for killing the golden goose!

We also continue to try to be active in the management of EA’s waterways, especially the Thames, although unfortunately we don’t presently have many members who are based there. The funding of waterways activities within the EA has also been extensively cut back and a completely new structure of volunteer engagement has been introduced. Many experienced staff have been disposed of and relatively inexperienced new staff introduced into key roles. On the Thames especially, we have continued to work with other boater representative organisations and recently we have at last seen some improvement in the EA’s willingness to engage with us. A very welcome change to earlier attitudes, where it had seemed to many of us that they simply saw no benefit in working with boating groups. We

can only hope that a similar transformation could occur at CRT.

NABO has continued to be an active player in the Boat Safety Scheme and until recently David Fletcher was chair of its Technical Committee. He made a sterling job of ensuring that the Scheme is of real value to our boating community, often struggling with understaffing issues. At the same time, the scheme has had to deal with many necessary changes in the onboard requirements, as well as the continual need to ensure that all requirements keep pace with the changing nature of boats, especially in relationship to new technologies. In my own role as a boater representative on the Technical Committee and as a Chartered Electrical Engineer,

I had been particularly anxious about all aspects of the BSS's electrical requirements, largely resulting from the increasingly widespread use of 240volt AC-based systems. Having always been concerned about the lack of guidance to installers, boat designers and, indeed, amateurs making changes to their own boats, I was delighted that my recent employers, the Institution for Engineering and Technology (IET, formerly the IEE) decided to produce such a guideline text. After a year's work involving advisers from all the relevant bodies, this has finally been published.

In terms of your Council's activities, I would like to pay special tribute to our retired NABO News editor, Peter Fellows, who for many years has been continually improving and expanding its contents—always making it of relevance to our members and the thousands of others who read it. It is also apparently compulsory reading for CRT and EA staff – given their frequent screams after publication, when they haven't liked what they were

reading. I was saddened when Peter finally decided that, in selling his boat and going farming in Wales, he should step down, but I am delighted that John Sadler has quickly picked up the reins and is doing a great job.

It is also very good to see that, through the work of my vice-chair Anne Husar and CJ (Carolyn Green), we now have a major presence in many areas of social media. I just wish that a few more of the thousands of followers would add more muscle to our work by deciding to become paid-up NABO members.

In thanking others, especial thanks go to Helen Hutt, not only for her highly professional management of all aspects of our financial affairs, but also for her work on the CRT Council as an elected boater's representative. Thanks too to Phil Goulding for his work on the CRT's winter works group, and again to David Fletcher on CRT's NAG (Navigation Advisory Group).

Finally, I have to conclude my thanks by paying tribute to Ken Hylins, our Welfare Officer. Having had his own problems, but with extensive experience as a liveaboard boater and a deep knowledge of fundamental rights and entitlements (especially of those with problems), he has done a wonderful job in helping so many folk battling the bureaucracy of CRT or local authorities. I think some of the CRT staff must cringe when they get a request to call Ken, they are aware that he knows more about a boater's legal rights than they ever will. His unstinting and selfless service of others is proving a fertile recruiting ground for NABO. People really see the value of having us alongside them.

And so, thank you all so much for many wonderful years and I am sure my successor will find the role as interesting and fulfilling as I have.



Following Mike as chair of NABO is going to be difficult to do. His calm manner and measured approach is one I will attempt to emulate. Thank you Mike for your invaluable work over the years as chair.

When we began our boat travels, British Waterways was running the show. I remember planning our cruises, we were continuous cruis-

ers then, with never a thought about stoppages until the winter months when they were expected and planned around. We also rarely considered whether we were too deep drafted to moor up anywhere we fancied and grounding mid-channel was almost unheard of, unless we went 'off piste' on lesser used canals. Locks worked with all paddles usable, grass was cut.

Then followed several years exploring European waterways but we kept in touch with UK boating friends who were beginning to report a deterioration. The Canal and River Trust had taken over. On our return to England, the changes became apparent as we recommenced continuous cruising. I needn't itemise them here, we have all experienced them. As I write this NABO Council is heavily involved with the Fund Britain's Waterways campaign; pushing for HVO to be an affordable alternative to diesel for boats; suggesting realistic ways forward for ALL eligible liveaboard boaters to at last receive the energy grant given to households last winter; holding CRT to account for their actions, from their above inflation boat licence increases to the ever spiralling number of unplanned stoppages.

So, persistent efforts have to be made to get positive change before the canals return to the '60's. We have a very active and committed Council, what we do need are more willing and active members. There's a spare seat on Council and a couple of vacancies for regional reps. Please get in touch with me for more information on these roles. After all, as JFK might have said had he known that only two members attended our recent AGM, ask not what NABO can do for you, but what you can do for NABO.

I look forward to working with and for you all.

## Ask not what NABO can do for you...

New Chair **Anne Husar** brings her years of experience to the job

...and chocolate





Please let me introduce myself as a new NABO council member. I hope to make a worthwhile contribution.

I was fortunate to be introduced to the canal community 30+ years ago in central London by a friend of a friend who was a liveaboard. That chance meeting changed canals for me from being a curiosity glimpsed when driving over a bridge, to my career, home, social circle, hobby and obsession.

In many ways, canals display what is best about Britain. The industrial history (and increasingly social history), the innovation, the combination of dogged individualism with a willingness to share time, effort, experience, knowledge and tools with strangers. A strong community that is naught but a dim memory for most people.

My journey started by buying a boat in Little Venice for £13,750 (which included a BW-sanctioned 10% uplift for a berth in Little Venice which tells you how long ago that was), to being a skipper for Jason's and London Waterbus, the Blomfield Road moorings warden, the Little Venice pump out operator, Chair and Vice Chair of local canal charities, working at Limehouse for BW, working at Priory Marina for BWML and now being part owner and manager of Mercia Marina in Willington, Derbyshire.

I've been fortunate to combine a way of life, hobby and career all rolled into one.

But it's under threat. Not from overstayers, not from the shiny boat brigade, not from liveaboards, not from the boaters that don't wave hello. There is now a real threat of localised closure (or worse) due to the Government sticking to its reduced funding plans for CRT and CRT's rising costs/lack of sufficient alternative streams of income. It's

a chicken or egg situation. Was the original plan for CRT flawed or CRT's delivery of that plan? Both no doubt, and the situation facing EA waters is even worse...

Why NABO? NABO recognises boating is a broad church, that we all have more in common than what separates us and its council as well as members reflect that variety. NABO has garnered a lot of respect for its



## The best of Britain

Introducing new vice-chair **Rob Neff**

work on technical matters, BSS, boater welfare, licensing, legal matters, heritage and maintenance. At a cost of £25 a year, membership is well worth it. Make your voice heard.

Mercia Marina



# Fly on the wall

Observes proceedings at the AGM and Council meeting in November.



**N**ew members were voted on to the council and the Chair resigned his post during the AGM elections. Many thanks were expressed for Mike Rodd's long, dedicated and knowledgeable service in the role. The new council then elected Anne Husar as the new chair.

## New licence charges, are they legal?

NBTA are looking at legal advice on the lawfulness of the licence structure. They are also looking at the charitable objectives and the duty to look after the disadvantaged.

NABO attended the West Midlands CRT User Forum in Wolverhampton on 17th October 2023. It was once more a series of presentations that tried to demonstrate how well CRT are doing in the West Midlands. There was a lively discussion on the licence increases with questions and comments fielded by Matthew Symonds with CRT's view of necessity and fairness.

## Good news about gas

The Calor Gas supply situation has quietened down, as reported at the AGM it was confirmed that most suppliers are getting enough 13kg bottles. The winter period will be telling.

## Energy Support Grants

Energy Support Grant and liveboard boaters who are not CC's. Danny Kruger MP is taking action to get liveboard boaters a fuel support grant.

## The year on Social Media

NABO now have 2500 followers on X, formerly known as Twitter. Boaters are regularly responding to our tweets. On the whole our followers have been supportive. Facebook is prospering. New group members are coming on almost every day. Some of them are even joining NABO.

## Welfare Officer's Report

Ken Hylins reported that he continues to support numerous members regionally. He has been in contact with the Equalities Commission but they do not consider that there is grounds to consider discrimination in CRT's actions because boaters are not an ethnic, religious or racial group.

He is in touch with traveller contacts to explore this further.

## BSS and electrical safety

NABO attended the recent BSS AC meeting.

There was a lot of discussion of concerns about lithium batteries and batteries from small portable devices. It was noted that charging an electric scooter had caused a serious boat fire.

The BSS AC Committee needs a new chair after the resignation of Phil Aspy. The dead line for nominations is 6 December 2023.

## Then there's always the admin

New web software and site are progressing and will be trialled before release. Accounts were presented and accepted.

## NABO Calendar 2024

The Council meetings in 2024 will be on:

20th January 2024

Zoom

16th March 2024

Zoom

18th May 2024 at

Tamworth Cruising Club

13th July 2024

Zoom

14th September 2024

Zoom

16th November 2024 after the AGM

AGM, 16 November 2024

at Tamworth Cruising Club

## Disabled Boater Forum

20th December 2023

Online

14th February 2024

Online

# Parliamentary exchanges

19 October 23

**Justin Madders** Shadow Minister (Future of Work), Shadow Minister (Employment Rights and Protections)

To **Rebecca Pow** The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

**What recent discussions has she had with the Canal & River Trust on its funding?**

**Rebecca Pow** We have had many discussions with the Canal & River Trust over the past three years on the review of its funding, and we are providing it with more than £400 million of additional funding between 2027 and 2037.

When the trust was created in 2012, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the trust signed a memorandum of understanding agreeing that the trust would have to move increasingly towards alternative sources of funding.

**Justin Madders** In Ellesmere Port, we are proud that the Canal & River Trust has made its headquarters there, but we are concerned about the implications of the funding decisions, which amount to a £300 million cut in real terms over the next decade.

Clearly that will cause the Trust real problems, so I urge the Minister to think again about these decisions and to engage with the Trust about how that gap can be bridged.

**Rebecca Pow** We all recognise the important work and benefits that the Canal & River Trust brings, but the £300 million cut in funding asserted by the Trust is not correct, because that includes adjustments for inflation. Government funding does not provide for that. We should also remember that an investment portfolio of over £1 billion was transferred to the trust, and it gets the benefits of the investments and the funding that accrues from them.

**Michael Fabricant** Conservative, Lichfield As chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways, I share concerns about the future of our canal network, but I am conscious of the fact that 15 years ago when the Trust was set up, the aim was for it to be self-financing. Richard Parry, the chief executive, has discussed with me and Ministers in the past the possibility of receiving a lump sum, rather than a sum over 10 years. What progress has been made on that?

**Rebecca Pow** I thank my Hon. Friend for all the valuable work he does in that capacity. That subject is still under discussion.



Justin Madders



Rebecca Pow



Michael Fabricant

# Read the small print

## RCR warns of sub-standard insurance cover

### More information

Call 01785 785680 or email [enquiries@rivercanalrescue.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@rivercanalrescue.co.uk) to find out more.

**B**reakdown and emergency assistance firm, River Canal Rescue (RCR), is calling for boaters to check their terms & conditions if they have a third-party insurance policy, as many will leave them unable to recover all costs if their boat sinks.

RCR says it's aware of a number of insurance companies that are capitalising on the demand for cheap policies by modifying their terms & conditions, including removing some common third-party risks or adding them as optional extras.

This, says managing director, Stephanie Horton, is causing major problems for owners, who due to unclear Policy Information Documents, are unaware they'll be left to foot the bill for vessel re-float, pollution management and environmental damage claims, should their vessel sink. "While most third-party policies will support 'salvage' – vessel sinking – claims, as there's a risk you may cause damage to the environment and other vessels, do not take this for granted. Boat age is another issue; although a standard policy covers specific age-ranges, insurers can exclude certain vessels, or will only insure with a survey, not a BSS certificate, so it's important to check."

### Support in traumatic circumstances

RCR is also concerned about claims handling, saying a number of insurers fail to appreciate boaters' circumstances or support them during what is usually a very traumatic event.

Stephanie continues: "The emphasis is generally on claimants to limit further damage, organise estimates, report on what's happening and pay for the work.

Most insurers don't take into account if you're on holiday, you cannot progress the claim as you would if at home, and if you're a live-aboard, and have just lost everything including your bank cards, phone and personal possessions, you're not in a position to take any of the above actions.

"Before buying insurance, check the policy exclusions and optional extras, and ask how your claim will be processed if your vessel sinks or is at risk of sinking - is there a 24 hour helpline and online support?"

### Compare insurance offerings

To help boaters navigate third-party policies and claims handling procedures, RCR has compiled two insurer comparison tables.

Where possible its team checked all available policy documents, but this may not cover everything, so use only as a framework. Similarly, the claims handling data is based on general claims, and each case may be different.

RCR and its subsidiary, Canal Contracting, respond to hundreds of incidents resulting in insurance claims every year and regularly witness insurance policies failing to meet customer expectations and variations in insurer claims handling. Its Incident Care team helps boaters manage insurance claims and reduce risks following an emergency.

# Climate change blamed for flood damage

**T**he Canal & River Trust is working to respond to the damage left by Storm Babet. Hundreds of trees have been blown down, and the canal network has suffered structural damage including towpaths washed away, a landslide on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, and considerable damage on the Leicester Line of the Grand Union Canal where the River Soar flooded into the canal, causing over 50 metres of bank to collapse.

The Trust's staff and volunteers attended numerous call-outs as they battled to control water levels and respond to damage, whilst, on the Erewash Canal in Sandiacre in Derbyshire, the quick response by one of the Trust's volunteers averted disaster when they were able to rescue a member of the public who fell into the canal, one of many people who were still using the towpath, despite it being submerged under storm water.

Richard Parry, chief executive of the Canal & River Trust, comments: "I'd like to thank colleagues and volunteers at the Trust for battling across the weekend to control water levels, responding to the emergencies caused by Storm Babet, and for all their efforts to keep everyone safe."

"Our canal network is a national treasure dating back 250 years. It isn't safely locked away as an exhibit in a museum. It is here to be navigated by boats as they did centuries ago, used freely by millions of people, and for the benefit of wildlife. We're going to see Storm Babet

leave the canal network with a bill likely to be in the £millions. This illustrates the increasing expense of keeping the canal network safe and open, at a time when funding from government is reducing in real terms ahead of the steep future cuts they announced earlier this year. These extra costs are becoming increasingly common place as the changing climate takes its toll. Without adequate funding, they will lead to the gradual deterioration and eventual closure of some canals."

"The work of staff and volunteers, together with the support of our partners and friends, is vital if we are to keep our canals alive to benefit this and future generations."

For more information on the Trust's Keep Canals Alive campaign, [canalrivertrust.org.uk/donate/our-campaigns/keep-canals-alive](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/donate/our-campaigns/keep-canals-alive) and please sign and share the Fund Britain's Waterways petition [www.change.org/p/fundbritainswaterways](https://www.change.org/p/fundbritainswaterways)

Towpath collapse caused by storm Babet



# Keep the Lift alive

## CRT launches winter fundraising appeal Keep the Anderton Lift Alive

For more information, visit [canalrivertrust.org.uk/places-to-visit/anderton-boat-lift-visitor-centre](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/places-to-visit/anderton-boat-lift-visitor-centre) or call 01606 786777

To donate to the 'Keep Anderton Alive' appeal, please go to [canalrivertrust.org.uk/keepandertonalive](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/keepandertonalive).

Boat trips through the lift stopped for 2023 at the end of October.

Over winter (November – March), the Anderton Boat Lift & Visitor Centre continues to welcome visitors to the cafe and site at weekends only – Saturdays and Sundays, 9.30am – 4.30pm.

The Trust's popular Santa Cruises will run on all four weekends through December running up to Christmas.

The Canal & River Trust has launched a new winter appeal to 'Keep Anderton Boat Lift Alive' as it undertakes a major refurbishment project to ensure Cheshire's historic 'Cathedral of the Canals' remains operational for the next generation.

The 150-year-old structure, the world's first major commercial boat lift, needs an upgrade to enable the ageing machinery to continue transporting around 3,000 boats a year, 50 feet between the Trent & Mersey Canal and the River Weaver Navigation below.

The Trust operates the Scheduled Monument and runs the surrounding site as a popular visitor attraction. Each year thousands of tourists enjoy trips through the lift and along the river to Northwich aboard the Edwin Clark trip boat, named after one of the lift's 19th century creators. As well as welcoming up to 100,000 visitors each year, the site also offers educational visits for schools, and a range of volunteering opportunities.

In addition to the work required to preserve and protect the iconic structure, there is also a proposal for upgrades to the visitor centre, amenities, and grounds surrounding the boat lift, as well as plans to construct a contemporary education and events space and the development of new learning, skills, and outreach programmes. The first milestone was achieved last December, when the Trust was awarded a £574,000 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to support the development phase of this essential project.

Canal & River Trust project manager Fran Littlewood said: "Anderton Boat Lift is one of the 'Seven Wonders of the Waterways' and it is our mission to keep it operational for generations to come.

"By January 2024, we are looking to appoint the main contractor, who will design and plan the works programme over the summer. The Trust will be seeking further grant funding and support from local businesses and philanthropists, which will be vital in enabling us to deliver the project.

"If all goes well, the plan will be to close the lift in early summer 2025 and reopen it 12–18 months later. This means that boaters and visitors can expect to enjoy a full season of boating in 2024 and potentially a short window around the following Easter, before it is wrapped in a protective encapsulation skin to give it a special 150th anniversary upgrade.

"Ever since the boat lift was created to provide a vital trade link between the river and canal, it has been a challenge to maintain. Salty water meant the original hydraulic rams rusted and seized up, and these were eventually replaced with a 1908 electric pulley system to haul the boat caissons up and down. In 1983, 75 years later, it was declared unsafe and shut down for nearly two decades before it was restored around the Millennium.

"It is remarkable that this impressive, eclectic heritage structure is still working. If we deliver this important upgrade project now, it will hopefully ensure that we keep Anderton Boat Lift alive for many

years to come—continuing to delight thousands of visitors and connecting two busy waterways for boaters.”

The Anderton Boat Lift  
Photo: Sharon Wells



## NABO at the user groups

# Notes from the Thames Navigation Users Forum (TNUF) 4th October

An update was given on legal responsibility of riparian owners at site, EA to partake further discussion with landowners.

John Dutson (JD) Waterways Senior Advisor, provided updates on improved funding for wreck removal and comms package to inform boat owners of riparian responsibilities.

Andy Soper (AS) The Barge Association questioned when update on Volunteer Assistant Lock Keepers will be available.

Brian Clark (BC), British Marine Thames Valley, asked where revenue generated by accommodation licensing is allocated. Andy Croxford (AC) Waterways Local Delivery Lead noted revenue is part of collective income for navigation only and increased income will see increased allocation for navigation.

Chris Turner (CT), Association of Thames Yacht Clubs questioned why Marlow Lock moorings had closed. Marlow Lock offers short stay mooring only. JD noted Marlow Lock timber moorings were rotting and deemed unsafe. CT noted increased number of boats moored at Marlow Lock that are affecting navigation. JD confirmed intention to reopen Marlow Lock mooring structure when deemed safe.

Colin Chiverton (CC) Area Environment Manager, highlighted maximising income via intelligence-led operations. CC noted whole river census conducted with Waterways which provided boat registration outlook and future enforcement strategy.

BC noted complete compliance rates at some marinas and questioned where most unregistered boats would be located. Resource will be used to target remaining 15% that is likely outside of marinas.

John Paine (JP) Thames Motor Boaters Association questioned how Lock Keepers can conduct enforcement when boats navigating through locks do not display a licence. JD confirmed all boats should display a registration plate and Lock Keepers are able to challenge and see visitor's registration.

John Shepherd (JSH) Royal Yachting

Association, questioned EA's right to conduct compliance in marinas. JD noted 'off-river' marinas have been judged in court to be part of the River Thames and subject to enforcement.

Sam Holland (SH) raised issue with unpowered boats not displaying registration. Noted example of significant increase in unpowered craft registration. National working towards on-line boat registration but reviewing customer concerns.

Kevin East (KE) British Canoeing, thanked SH for briefing. Information on forums is directed to remind users of rules of navigation. He also raised issues about contaminated canoe portages and whether canoe portage locations could be added to River Thames: locks and facilities for boaters guidance page.

Eliot Beagles, Thames Navigation Capital Programme Lead, noted majority of Capital Investment Programme includes lock closures for maintenance but highlighted work to increase lock resilience e.g., spare lock collar straps and hydraulic systems upgrade. AS questioned presentation of lock closure dates and whether new pumpouts will include contactless payment. JD and Peter Collins (PC) Assets Manager, noted ambition to get contactless payment when available for all systems.

PC noted lock gate strategy included to ensure refurbishment works with new materials to preserve the heritage of lock sites.

MHe confirmed Sunbury Dry Dock has no plans to reopen. CT questioned future of barge present at dock. MHe confirmed it is to go for disposal.

Greg Wheeler (GW) British Marine Thames Valley, questioned timeframe over electric charging points. JD not able to provide timeframe.

Mike Rodd NABO, introduced CRT's proposals for licence increases above inflation, with substantial increases for boats without home mooring and wide beam boats.

PF raised complaints seen regarding the speed of rowing coaches and questioned exemption via speed pennant.



## NABO at the user groups

# Boaters Reps Meeting, 23rd October

Helen Hutt reports

Well, folks, this was quite something.

First on the agenda was, of course, the new licensing proposals. Matthew Symonds, CRT Boating Manger, made it clear from the outset that this is a done deal, acknowledging that there will be adverse reactions, no amount of complaining will change CRT's mind. They are confident that legally they are within their rights and the proposals are fully supported by the Trustees. An across-the-board increase was considered as an option but, based on sightings (75% of movements were CCers, 25% home moorers), it was decided CCers should pay more. Widebeams, simply because they occupy more of the water. The boater consultation backed this up. It was considered that those with a home mooring (64%) were already paying considerably more than their licence fee to be on the water, therefore should not be subject to the uplift. The amount raised will increase the income from licences from 11% to 13%, partly making up for the Defra shortfall. Surprisingly to me, the meeting was divided in opinion, with two strongly in favour of the changes; three strongly against; and three sitting on the fence. We insisted the rationale behind the uplift (as I hope it will now be called) is explained when the November announcement is made so that at least boaters understand it. The cost of Gold Licences is still being calculated. We were assured that other waterways users (fishermen, canoeists, paddle boarders) will all see an increase in their licence fees.

The licence evasion rate has doubled in 5 years: The pandemic encouraging more people to take to the water, boaters moving less during this period and becoming used to 'getting away with it' because sightings were suspended, the cost of living crisis and more persistent health problems. More boats and particularly liveaboards on the water means more licence evasion and more intervention from CRT. There are currently around 2,000 unlicensed boats (some late payers, easily resolved) and another 700 'in the system' where CRT's welfare officers are involved in trying to help vulnerable boaters find solutions to

their problems. This year, CRT has offered support to 1,600 boaters. Licensing team is taking a slightly harder line without compromising help given to genuinely vulnerable boaters; looking at better use of technology; possibly using debt collection agencies and credit checks (one of the main problems is that some boaters give a different name for their licence than is on their bank account so cannot be traced); overstay requests could be automated to cut down admin. CRT deals with about 100 abandoned boats a year; it takes on average 2.5 years to go through the system before they can be removed from the water.

**Persistent overstayers:** I asked Matthew Symonds how boaters who reported such instances could be informed what was happening – privacy policies prevent them divulging this but he would consider if anything can be done. One possibility is to make the Index available on the website so that a particular boat's registration status can be checked by anyone (provided the index number is displayed!).

**Bookable moorings:** more resources (including physical policing) are now in place to ensure moorings are not wrongly occupied. The increase in cost to £25 a night have not affected bookings and there has been no adverse feedback to it. There are plans to expand available spaces in London. Liverpool: cost is similar, plus £7 a day for electricity (bollards are not metered, therefore a flat charge has to be made). Winter moorings are being offered here for the first time.

The pump-out contactless payment trial had gone well and the system will be rolled out over the coming weeks. A system is being set up for refunding unused cards, which will need to be returned to a dedicated CRT address, by 31st January 2024.

**CSF:** the Leeds facility was closed temporarily following persistent blocking of the Elsan with rags, shoes, clothing etc. It may be relocated or re-opened with security measures (eg CCTV). CRT is looking at alternatives to the universal and easily obtainable key, eg a swipe card issued to each licence holder.

## Trust questions raised

### Anne Husar asks

Will CCers who get a short term mooring, for example a winter mooring, be able to access a refund on the surcharge?

The minutes from our meeting with you in July where we put this question would appear to say yes, they will be able to claim a refund.

### Matthew Symonds responds

I don't think we said yes or no in July—we hadn't made a decision on licence pricing at that point! I think the notes say we have an existing process, not what will happen going forward.

We've said we will give answers to all these questions before the charges come into effect in April.

### We think

That's some time after the winter! Surely boaters will want to know before committing to the potentially extra expense?

The Fund our Waterways flotilla on the Thames

(See page 20)

Photo Tim Lewis



## BSS Committee

Phil Aspey has taken the decision to withdraw from the role of Chair of the BSS Advisory Committee after 8 years in the seat.

As the highly regarded independent Chair, he has supported and upheld the principles of the BSS, has helped drive issues through Committees and played a major role in ensuring the BSS was given well-rounded advice.

Potential candidates may have been away on holiday or may have missed the original announcement, so we are asking if you would once again approach the people you represent to see if there are any potential candidates who are boat users, or members of the marine trade, who would like to put their name forward.

It is worth promoting that the role is independent of the BSS Office and the Scheme's owners, and it is key to the smooth running of the committee processes.

The BSS Office is also now opening the process to the wider public by publicising the vacancy in a news release, on the BSS website and through social media.

[boatsafetyscheme.org/BSSAC-Chair](https://boatsafetyscheme.org/BSSAC-Chair)

# To moor or not to moor

## MOORINGS UNDER REVIEW

### Llangollen moorings trial ends early

Despite claiming to run a trial until the 31 October 2023 Canal and River Trust updated their policy on mooring at Llangollen on the 27 October 2023.

A message from Tom Freeland, Boating & Customer Service Manager West Midlands.

As you know, we've been running a trial on the moorings at Llangollen this summer, which is due to come to an end at the start of November. We've had lots of great feedback, during both the consultation and trial phases.

In summary we've seen:

- Numbers of visitors unaffected, with similar levels spending the night here as in summer 2022
- Lots of positive feedback: on providing some 5 day moorings, getting the level of pricing right, and the attractiveness of the basin
- A few suggestions for improvements: greater clarity on signage especially on flexibility of how long you can stay; further improvements to landscaping; more flexible ways to pay & book
- We're therefore proposing to make the following changes from 1st November:
- Continuation of £12 a night charge year-round, paid for at Llangollen Wharf cafe
- Most moorings will be available to stay on for up to 14 nights stay over from 1st November to 31st March (as with most Trust visitor moorings)
- Whole winter moorings are available for those wanting to stay here longer – see [canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/moorings/winter-moorings](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/moorings/winter-moorings)

[canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/moorings/winter-moorings](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/moorings/winter-moorings)

- Provision of 4 'up to 5 days' stay berths on same pontoons from 1st April
- We're investing in some clearer, updated signage to help visitors know the arrangements for mooring and payment
- We're actively seeking funding to convert the bollards to 'pay as you go' electricity supply, in line with majority of Trust bollards
- We're always on the lookout for volunteers to help us monitor and improve the moorings – look out for Ranger and Towpath Taskforce roles on our website.

Thank you for your support and constructive suggestions during this trial. We hope you enjoy your next visit to the moorings in Llangollen as much as your last.

### More information

You can see details of the changes at [canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/west-midlands/langollen-moorings-trial-2023](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/west-midlands/langollen-moorings-trial-2023).

### To volunteer

[canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer/opportunities](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer/opportunities) and search 'Llangollen'





# A MESSAGE TO WESTMINSTER

## Fund Britain's Waterways make their voices heard

A flotilla of boats today delivered a visual and vocal message to the Palace of Westminster that funding cuts for our canals and rivers are unacceptable and damaging.

The boats, a mixture of leisure and commercial, drew Parliamentarians' attention to their presence and the banners they were displaying by sounding their horns and holding station outside the Palace of Westminster. They were cheered on by a group of supporters on Westminster Bridge.

The boaters and supporters acted on behalf of the campaign group Fund Britain's Waterways which represents over 100 organisations with varying interests in the waterways.

The group is campaigning to ensure that there is sufficient funding to retain the huge environmental, economic and social benefits that Britain's inland waterways are widely acknowledged to provide. It will continue working to ensure that future governments continue to invest the relatively small amount of funding that is required to maintain all these benefits, slightly less than 1% of Defra's annual budget. The Westminster cruise built on the success of well supported campaign cruises earlier in the year in Birmingham and Gloucester. More events are being planned in the run up to the next General Election. Sir David Suchet CBE FRSA, a long-

term supporter of the waterways and a Vice President of the Inland Waterways Association, said “Our waterways are valued and used by millions of people. Over the years volunteers have not only worked to protect and restore them but also ensured that governments appreciate their value. I am pleased to see this proud tradition continue.”

Christine Kemp, a long-standing waterway volunteer and liveaboard boater who participated in this cruise, as well as in an earlier campaign in 2007, said “Who would have thought after the 2007 campaign cruise against Defra cuts that we would need to be here again in 2023, asking the Government to look after our heritage and infrastructure. My

boat is my home, and I spend time volunteering to help keep the canals in as good a condition as we can, but cuts to waterways funding will have a devastating effect on the canals and my way of life. Our waterways are one of the things that make this country special—serious cuts to their funding risk losing them for everyone.”

**Support for the campaign can be shown by signing the petition available at [www.fundbritainwaterways.org.uk](http://www.fundbritainwaterways.org.uk).**



# FUND BRITAIN'S WATERWAYS



# What does success look like?

## CRT ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING

Sue Tonius keeps her eye on the spin

I particularly liked the part where the previous year's £167m loss was reduced by the finance director to only a £7m one because of their £160m current year gains.

Maths was never my strong point but surely that should be a £327m income if CRT are so successful??

Yet again, boating income was put at only 11% instead of pointing out that it's the third highest of CRT's income streams.

Lack of evidence continues for the continuous cruiser surcharge, with Richard Parry saying that it would "seem" likely that they use the system more than other users. But then, as a monopoly, they don't need to justify anything, do they. It's not as if their boating 'customers' can go anywhere else.

Salaries of the top staff justified by needing to attract and retain talented people with the chair of

trustees saying they were appropriate. If they are so talented, why is the Trust failing both in attracting more income and canal maintenance?

Our canal heritage, what's left of it, continues to be sold off due to "financial pressures" and will be into the future. However, wharves will be kept where they are in the "right" location, wherever that is.

Matthew Symonds trumpeted the CRT help and meeting hours put in to get liveaboard CCers the energy grant. Nothing about the 6,000 who still haven't been able to apply, in large part due to CRT's erroneous classifications.

Maggie Gardner, the highly paid fund raising director, actually didn't manage to slip in that she was still new to the role this time. She did talk a lot about how wonderful the canals were, while I for one waited, and waited, to hear how she was achieving more fund raising income.

### The NBTA online meeting

I listened in to much of this online meeting about the surcharge. There were 109 somewhat unruly participants according to my tool bar, although NBTA claimed 300.

Ideas with the most support included a march on CRT offices, a protest flotilla, picketing of CRT events, blockading the system, covering up of boat names and numbers, a licence strike, blowing of horns on the same date and time across the system. The organisers were strongly against ignoring the 14 day rule and refused to discuss that option. The upshot was the setting up of



working groups, mainly to look at a licence strike and legal approach. Also writing to the Charity Commission because of the rules against targeting the poor if you are a charity.

That wasn't mentioned. She also neglected to mention that CRT are advertising more well paid managerial vacancies to add to her department. But CRT are going to have a fund raising strategy, soon....

As for Mr Orr, he was apparently impressed by the rising numbers of people using the tow-paths (such a shame they contribute so very little in funds to CRT Mr Orr), and that CRT made sure everyone was safe during the recent storm. Really? All by themselves?

There was complete denial from him that CRT was expected to become non-reliant on Government aid post 2027 as agreed when they took over from BW, instead the usual on the financial threats from an inadequate Government grant for the continuation of the system, both

from him and Mr Parry. At least Fund Britain's Waterways got several mentions with a recognition that it was difficult to convince people that the money would be well spent when trying to get peeps on side.

He concluded that there had to be better communication about all that's being done to maintain the network and that the trustees scrutinise how the income is spent.

With visitor numbers up, 700 miles of Green Flags awarded and 4000 regular volunteers (thank goodness!), CRT is apparently doing a good job. I can't help but recall Mr Parry saying earlier in the year that, in his view, the canals would be "in an even worse state" if he and CRT hadn't taken them over, a rare piece of insightful honesty that they really hadn't done a successful job.



## From the Canal and River Trust's website

"Our strategic goals form a sustainable cycle that will deliver our vision & secure the future of the waterways for generations to come"

### Our ambitions for 2025

In developing this strategy we have given some thought to what success might look like over the next 10 years. Here are just a few of the ambitious measures we have identified, to create clear aspirations for what the Trust and our waterways can become in 2025:

- A popular place to visit with around half a billion visits to our waterways and museums, up from around 350 million today. **Editor: Who counts the tow path walkers?**
- Host to a thriving boating community, with the vast majority, at least 85%, of boaters and waterway-related businesses satisfied with the Trust's service. **Editor: I doubt that!**
- A well-known charity, with 75% of the people aware of us – up from 30% now, and with 50% of people willing to support us and the waterway cause. **Editor: Depends what 'people' means, most people without an interest in canals are not aware**
- A well-supported charity with around 100,000 regular individual donors, up from 10,000 now. **Editor: £1,000,000 in donations over 10 years, recruited around 3,000 Friends and received**

**pledges of support from 17 corporate partners. Why are CRT short of money?**

- A great place to volunteer with volunteers involved in all aspects of our work and contributing 1 million hours of time, up from 400,000 hours today. **Editor: There's 4000 volunteers, so each would have to contribute 250 hours a year. Possible.**
- Communities across the system will be involved in actively caring for their local waterway, with around 500 local adoptions in place, up from around 85 today. **Editor: Achievement unknown**
- Connecting with the future generation of supporters, with around one million children and young people each year involved with our waterways through volunteering, arts, education, sport and social action. **Editor: CRT July 2023, 84 education volunteers have inspired around 10,000 children to learn more about the waterways.**
- The inland waterways network will be growing, with many more miles of restored or new waterways introduced. **Ed: The current talks are about which ones to close.**

# News From Anglian Waters

Peter Early meanders along the eastern waterways

Well, a strange summer. A period of indifferent weather bookended by unbroken sunshine, and this year we managed to make the most of it. But where was everyone? OK, the Great Ouse is not the busiest of waterways for much of the year but even over the school holiday period we never found it difficult to moor where we hoped, even finding space on the pontoon at Downham Market, a spot notorious for over stayers.

This year we paid the extra for the Anglian Pass, £112 in our case, to enable us to cruise up to Cambridge. Was it worth it? Well, not for us. We had been several times in the past when a visitor licence was good value but wanted to revisit the river. But Cambridge has to be the most unwelcoming city for boaters in the UK. There is only room for around 6 narrowboats in total in the city centre, the grass is uncut and much of

the fendering is missing with bolts sticking out. I had forgotten there were mooring rings until I tripped over one hidden in the grass.

However, the River Cam above Bottisham Lock is lovely. Unlike the rest of the River Great Ouse system this is how you expect a river to be. No high flood banks, tree lined, people walking and cycling. Of course, you have the rowers to watch out for but that just adds to its idyllic nature. So, if you are a visitor buy the Anglian Pass rather than just a visitor licence for the Middle Level and enjoy it.

I should add that many local boaters no longer visit Cambridge due to the cost which means the small amount of mooring is no longer a problem. We visited 3 times over the summer and for some of those days we were the only boat.

A number of the EA visitor moorings remain closed with two of the Denver ones unlikely to reopen. However, a new mooring has been built by the services at Denver. Not officially open yet whilst the grass becomes established but will be ready for next season.

There has been a rolling programme of renovating the other moorings with new fendering and missing mooring posts being replaced which should allow boats to moor closer together and so provide more space.

On the Great Ouse the EA only have one closure over the winter. Brampton Lock will be shut from 9 January until 9 April 2024 so no upstream cruising for us at Easter.

The River Nene has stoppages at

The Unkempt Moorings at Cambridge







Above the lock in Cambridge on the Cam

several locks over the period from 1 November to 22 February 2024. Not likely to be much boat movement but if you are intending to cruise then best check with the EA.

On the Middle Level, Marmont Priory Lock is closed from 30 October to 19 December for replacement of the lock gates.

I've been reading the ramifications of the CRT Licence increase with interest as the EA are in similar financial straights. The EA don't recognise the boating category of Continuous Cruiser and previous attempts 2 years ago to introduce a

licencing structure in the Anglian Region based on width as well as length ended in a climb down. They did agree then that the licence fee increase for 2024 would be 2% but in view of inflation increases is that sustainable? We shall see in the Spring.

And finally we've achieved YouTube notoriety. I don't watch YouTube finding it pretty boring but apparently a narrowboater got upset when we rested against him whilst waiting at the services in Ely. Caused a bit of a laugh at our marina to be described as rude and intimidating.



The River Nene at Fotheringhay

# Dear Richard

NABO's Letter to Richard Parry, CEO, Canal and River Trust



Following our latest NABO Council meeting and considering unbelievably intensive and wide-spread input received via our membership and extensive social media channels, it would be remiss of me NOT to comment on the planned changes to your charges. I wish to state very clearly that NABO is extremely concerned by the proposed boat licence increases. It is worryingly clear that CRT are trying to raise money from boaters because they can easily do so but continue to be notably less forthcoming on the more

difficult issue of how they will be raising commensurate income from other users.

NABO's stance has always been and continues to be that there should be one licence and one charge based on length of boat, not on use. The amount you will raise from the licence 'surcharge' on the minority of boaters that are continuously cruising is very small. This makes it difficult to understand why it has been imposed at all when even a small increase across the board would bring in much more to CRT's coffers and would of course have the added benefit of being non-divisive. As it is, boat licence surcharges are seen by many boaters as divisive, undermining the community of the waterways. Already continuous

cruisers are saying that, in return for paying more than the rest, they will want priority at locks and facilities and there is a strong perception that CRT's introduction of these extra charges that squeeze minorities is immoral.

Whilst we fully accept that CRT has the legal right to set the basic fees, we are concerned that the current proposals have been determined without any meaningful consultation with those who will be most seriously affected by them. We also note with concern the findings of the Equalities Impact Assessment recently undertaken by your staff, which clearly shows the potentially negative impact of the suggested changes on those who are most vulnerable.

I would draw your attention to work we did in 2009, which proved that—legally—only one licence fee can be applied to private boats of a particular size, and that no distinction can be made between those with a home mooring and those without one, i.e., those who are continuously cruising. The surcharges you propose will thus not be legally enforceable, and we strongly urge you to reconsider.

They are not based on any supporting evidence that continuous cruising or wide beams cost more or less than anyone else. Of course there are continuous cruisers who cover many lock miles but there are plenty that don't. The same for wide beams, many never leave their marina, so they balance those that do. To reiterate, there is no strong argument. CRT may be able to do 'as they

see fit', but as a public service provider, that must be based on some public evidence. We are once again confirming the position with our solicitors.

We completely understand and deprecate the funding issues that CRT are currently facing; indeed, it was NABO's initiative that established the "Fund Britain's Waterways" movement which now has just on 100 supporting organisations.

We nevertheless feel extremely strongly that you are hitting the boating communities unfairly with these above inflation increases to address the Government funding shortcomings. Given that all other boating costs are also increasing, for example rocketing maintenance and mooring fees, we believe that you will simply see many boaters

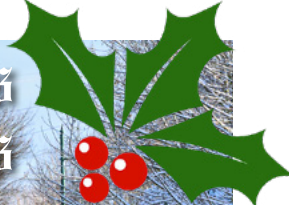
giving up and leaving the waterways that are under your control. The proposed plan of action could well result not only in a decrease in your income from boaters, but also a fall in the overall use of the waterways—hugely counter productive on both counts. There is no analysis that we have seen to support the argument that these increases will not just kill off boating. Is that not rather important for CRT to be sure of?

I would ask you to reconsider your decision and, in the best traditions of pragmatism, be prepared to make a U-turn. We are very willing to discuss this further with you and your colleagues, in pursuit of our shared objective of enhanced use and enjoyment of our lovely waterways.

Mike Rodd  
Chair of NABO

A winter scene on the canal arm at the Black Country Living Museum  
Photo: Kev Maslin

Wishing all our readers  
a very Happy Christmas  
and New Year



# Waterways at Risk

An article the IWA have sent to the Local Government Association's magazine.

by **Sir Robert Atkins**, former Waterways Minister, current local councillor and Trustee of the In-land Waterways Association

## Our canals and rivers are under threat.

Please join and support us at [fundbritainwaterways.org.uk](http://fundbritainwaterways.org.uk).

**T**hat may seem a strange statement when you think of the popularity of television programmes like Timothy West and Prunella Scales' Great Canal Journeys.

Or the millions of people who regularly use canals and rivers for exercise, recreation or active travel. Or the jobs, heritage or regeneration they enable.

I have seen at first hand the increasing popularity of our inland waterways as the 250-year old industrial network has been repurposed for leisure. Millions of hours of volunteer effort have gone into restoring derelict waterways. Today restoration projects continue around the country, and the waterways are being reimagined again for climate change mitigation.

Inland waterways are widespread. Nationally there are 5,000 navigable

miles and almost 80% of local authorities have a navigable waterway or a waterway under restoration. In 2022 an estimated 8.9 million people took part in an inland boating or watersports activity, resulting in the delivery of £3.1bn in GVA to the UK economy in 2022/23 and supporting over 132,000 jobs. To this should be added the very substantial social and environmental value of waterways.

However the waterways are suffering from inflation, constrained funding and extreme weather events. Failing to maintain the infrastructure has consequences, as in 2019 when 1,500 local residents were evacuated in case the dam at Toddbrook Reservoir collapsed.

Yet despite the value of the waterways, their deteriorating condition and the minimal level of Government investment needed, the Government appears unwilling to invest appropriately. To address this threat Fund Britain's Waterways has come together. Over 100 organisations representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways are campaigning for national and local government to act now and protect the public benefit and natural capital of our waterways.

Encourage people to sign the public petition and write to their MPs. We need everyone's help to safeguard our waterways for future generations.

The cost of poor maintenance, the failure of the spillway at Toddbrook reservoir in 2019

Photo: David Brocklehurst/  
Balmforth Report



# Cotswold Canals Trust

An update from Nick Rowson of the Trustees

The restoration of the canal has seen a big increase in biodiversity and the 'Green/Blue' corridor of the canal and the River Frome is such an important wildlife resource. We work hard to manage the canal for the benefit of boaters, canal users and wildlife. Many of you will have had the excitement of seeing the otter families on the canal this spring, we were even featured on the BBC Spring Watch. At the end of September, under the guidance of our Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) colleagues, we used specialist machinery to create new 'scrapes' at Fromebridge – channels and ponds that will provide seasonal wetland to encourage wading birds. We've already had sightings of curlew and have timelapse cameras to follow how it develops.

It's hard to believe that November is here and we continue to have unseasonably mild weather. As a result, it is again harder to describe what the 'Bird Nesting Season' is. Moorhen on the canal, for example, were still hatching young into September. We do survey for nesting birds before our work on the canal and we now have three new volunteers who have been trained through GWT to undertake independent surveys next year.

This year we've had Phase 1A surveyed for water voles. Whilst we don't have anywhere near as many as on Phase 1B, we do have some and several lengths of Phase 1A provide suitable habitat. We've been working with one of the UK's best water vole ecologists, who is leading the licence application to Natural England to translocate our nationally important population as well as modify-ing our towpath and in-channel vegetation management to ensure we keep banks and reed fringes as suitable habitat.

Probably our biggest problem on Phase 1A is the amount of silt that washes into the canal from the nearby streams and from the numerous small springs that feed in from the valley sides. With the lack of regular maintenance during most of the pandemic, some sections of the canal had become impassable and as the depth of wa-



ter reduced, reed growth has spread across the canal. We have therefore started re-dredging the canal. This will allow for water vole habitat and maintaining a fringe of reed growth either side of the navigable channel. At Lodgemore Mill, a Truxor was hired for this as our boats couldn't get through. The Truxor is amphibious with rubber tracks that minimise damage to the banks and the vegetation we want to keep.

Lastly, management of the locks and canal infrastructure is a never-ending job for our volunteers. Recently the pound above Wallbridge emptied because debris stopped the lock paddles being closed. Fortunately, there were no wildlife losses, though the heron and dippers enjoyed the unexpected easy access to food! Then Storm Babet resulted in sections of the canal flooding at Homebase and near Lidl, Dudbridge, Stroud. We are currently working on solutions to repair the overflow at Griffin Mill which has caused the water level in that pound to drop.

It has been a dynamic and interesting season on the canals and we expect the winter months to be similar.

Griffin's Mill to Bowbridge Lock  
Photo: Sharon Wells





## DIARY OF A GONGOOZLER

Spotted near Bratch.  
Hoping that the skull and crossbones trophy on the bow of this boat is fake.  
Both Photos: Steve Teratsia

# Plastic Buddhas and the Jolly Roger

Photographer **Steve Teratsia** continues his critique of canal style

**F**ollowing my introductory rant I am pleased and very relieved to announce that I've not as yet received any death threats from gaudily dressed gentlemen, or had a sheep's head wearing a fedora left on the bonnet of my Volvo...

So I'll assume that it was all taken in good spirit.

I'm not a natural moaner really, it's a skill I've developed over the last couple of years and consider it my civic duty to pass on this morosity to others. Sharing is caring, so they say. I do however find that these feelings

of doom seem to get a bit worse after I've read a newspaper.

Indeed up until I recently retired I was quite well known locally as a bit of a fun loving playboy, quaffing the occasional Mackeson with my pals in The Moose & Handbag and regularly staying out until well after 10.00pm on those wild cribbage evenings.

Yes, I was quite the lad in my day. These days I try to enjoy a quiet life when my noisy neighbours allow. I've nothing against Country & Western music, but I can only tolerate so much of 'Dolly Parton's



Biggest Hits' before I start to lose what's left of my sanity.

"Get on with it" I hear you say, so without further ado here's the subject of today's whinge which is...

Weird and pointless stuff perched on top of or around boats that confuse or amuse me. All of these things I've seen with my very own eyes.

Firstly, let's kick off with plastic Buddhas... Come on guys, it really is unsightly enough to see some of you lot parading shirtless down a canal and proudly displaying your pot bellies, without plonking one of these tacky abominations on top of your boats. Artificial ducks too, like there aren't enough real ones out there for you to look at?

Dead potted plants. Just why? Are you under some sort of illusion that if you leave them there long enough that they'll spring back to life like Lazarus?

A very badly stuffed fox. Quite funny at first sight, but a bit grim in reality and probably infested with fleas.

Bicycles with just one wheel. Auditioning for Billy Smarts Circus are we?

A box of surgical gloves alongside a tub of Castrol grease. I didn't have the courage to hang around to ask what they were for.

Half a dozen nets of Brussels sprouts. Grateful that I don't have to share cabin space with that individual.

Giant metal butterflies and sunflowers. Not even acceptable in a garden as far as I'm concerned.

Jolly Roger flags. Sorry to inform you 'Me Hearty' that you're more Johnny Vegas than Johnny Depp.

A three piece Chesterfield suite. Probably delivering it somewhere but nonetheless it completely ruined what would have otherwise been a really nice photo.

A caged chinchilla. Cute, but why



anyone would wish to take a giant rodent on a narrowboat jour-ney baffles me.

A human skull. I truly hope it was a fake and not the trophy of a passing serial killer.

Last but by no means least, a buck naked sunbathing elderly gentleman. Thankfully he was lying face down, but the temptation to insert a dandelion between his buttocks while he slept was more compelling than it should have been. It was quite some sight, and I genuinely don't think I've witnessed that many wrinkles since I accidentally left a load of wet washing in the machine for a week. This horrific apparition occurred over four years ago now and I still can't unsee it.

Happy boating you lot, and above all stay safe. Oh, and if you are unfortunate enough to spot an aged, bald, goatee bearded idiot trudging the towpath who obviously hasn't a clue what he's doing with a camera... That'll likely be me. Say hello, and get the kettle on!



Poet and musician Heather Wastie grew up in the Black Country where her family owned ex-FMC narrow boat Laurel.

In 2006 she moved to Kidderminster where she was The Worcestershire Poet Laureate 2015/16. Heather is well known for her interpretations of oral history.

In 2013 she was Writer in Residence at the Museum of Carpet, turning people's memories into poems, monologues and songs.

She has written and performed many canal-related pieces, including two Canal & River Trust commissions, and has published eight poetry collections.

See <https://linktr.ee/heatherwastie> for links to Heather's website, audio and video recordings and more.

# Christmas in Nuneaton

Heather Wastie

Quarantined  
in the gloomiest corner  
of the dark, respectable room

dressed  
in trousers and pullovers  
not the regulation dress

for Christmas dinner  
at the Newdigate Arms  
we do not talk

of water cans for bathing  
of the old flat-iron Daphne unearthed  
to press our better trousers

of dragging pullovers and blouses from drawers,  
inspecting them for holes  
and smells

we do not mention  
the forgotten luxury  
of wearing a dress

we save our voices  
for rum and brandy on the holly-decked boats  
for singing every Christmas carol we can think of

tied at Griff Colliery  
where the land is flat and dreary  
where a low, clammy mist covers everything

and where we fill our lungs  
with the strong smell  
of goats.

**Words found in *Troubled Waters* by Margaret Cornish**

This is one of a series of 'found poems' inspired by wartime women trainees, later nicknamed 'idle women'.



# I am Spartacus

Time, says **Ian Hutson**, to show some solidarity

**N**ow is the time to (temporarily) rename our boats on CRT's website to just that: *Spartacus*

Odd? Well, yes and no. The Canal Company appear to be in some campaign to – ahem – alter the demographic of those afloat, perhaps remodelling our waterways to something used merely for the leisure pound. Apparently it is not the battered, dented, scratched, scraped, sad and sorry-looking and commercially repainted each year holiday hire boats that strain and damage the infrastructure, but those of us who are in fact piloting our precious homes when we cruise. I refer of course to the latest wheeze, the proposed “surcharge” on boats with folk living aboard.

No matter that the standard licence blesses all boats with use of the entire canal system and all services each and every hour of every day of each year. CRT seems to think that the coming drop in Taxpayer funding – which has yet to begin, current levels of funding being in place until 2027 – can be filled entirely by boaters, leaving walkers, cyclists, anglers and other seekers of “wellbeing” even less touched by CRT fiscal hand than now—boaters pay tax too. That's more than doubling of every licence fee, amid the continued crumbling of the system and the constant reductions in actual service levels.

The resistance to these plans is rolling and it is rolling in many ways. There is, however, one simple – and free – and easy – indication that we may all give to the Canal Company of our measure of disapprobation. The

CRT website (apparently they hate being referred to as ‘CRT’, almost as much as I dislike being referred to as a ‘git’ or ‘these people’) allows for each and every one of us to change our boat name.



We can show solidarity, we can make the website sweat a little, we can make boat number the one and only way of accurately referring to us. We can all change our boat name to *Spartacus*.

Obscure yourreal, long term boat name with tape, campaign banners, or magnetic vinyls.

When His Majesty's Free Press photographs our flotillas and blockades and asks for boat names we may all in turn stand and shout 'I am Spartacus.' It may resonate with the Guardian or the Times. It will certainly be a clear bras d'honneur.

Then, once we're being treated with the respect that paying customers deserve, we may whop our boat name of record back to Kingfisher or Heron or Whatever.





# Rewind

Issue No 4 2008

Howard Anguish reviews NABO News from 15 years ago.

INLAND NAVIGATION ISSUES, NEWS, AND VIEWS



- Licence Latest
- Ombudsman Report
- BW Annual Meeting

Issue 6 – October 2008

## Red Diesel Implementation.

This edition marked an important date in the boating calendar. Red Diesel was due to come into effect from November 2008 with further details of the rules, which will come into force after that date.

**The NABO Chairman and the secretary Stuart and Carole Sampson made their farewells** after announcing that they will be stepping down from their long held posts and this will be the last issue of NABO News for both of them. They will be hard acts to follow!

An excerpt of Notes from a forum held during the **BW 2006 AGM**: Funding gap—John Edmunds gave a stark portrayal of the funding gap BW faces—£30 million a year—with property development funding slowing to a trickle. He wished luck to those attempting to get more from Government; *“I was a treasury official once and I understand about lost causes!”* and went on to analyse how to proceed, *“We have to establish by proper research exactly what the benefits of the waterways are”*. He implored everyone to take a wider view and get together, *“If we don’t we will just be arguing about the size of our defeat.”*

**John Gummer MP** *“felt there was mileage in stressing the environmental advantages such as heat extraction.”*—*“We have to give ourselves an image that moves away from the trainspotting aspect of our history towards one which is clearly presenting the waterways as an essential contribution for to-*

*orrow,”*—and finally, *“Nothing concentrates the mind of MPs more than three letters on the same subject from their constituents”*—all very relevant in 2023, especially with reference to heat pumps! Shades of things to come!

Sarah Walters had a piece about **Foraging along the canals**, pointing out that Canal Banks are abundant with trees and plants, many uncultivated for years, potentially food and healing herbs (if we know what we are looking for). I wonder if many people these days still carry on with this interest, and indeed, what is the attitude of CRT to the taking of this abundant variety of vegetation? Sarah also pointed out the necessary precautions required before picking any food or herbs, and never taking anything if you are uncertain.

In the **“Nothing New”** department, was the shout of **“Slow Down”**—discussed in Members’ Letters. Increasing use of mooring on both sides of the canal has led to more angry shouts, even aimed at those considerate boaters who always slow down. The shouters apparently are moored boats, moored inconsiderately—slack or inadequate moorings, ropes not rigged properly, no fenders, and mooring pins badly rigged with pins angled back the wrong way. As is often the case, perception of speeding, and the subsequent movement of moored boats, is too often inconsiderate mooring by the very people doing the shouting! We should all make sure that we moor more considerately before trying to blame passing boats for the wrong perception of their inconsiderate behaviour.

NABO News back issues are available online at [nabo.org.uk/index.php/reference/nn-back-issues-2](http://nabo.org.uk/index.php/reference/nn-back-issues-2)

## Letters to the Editor

Opinions expressed here are independent of NABO policy and statements made have not been verified as accurate.

### Lockmaster maps looking for a new Skipper

Now that I've finally hung up my windlass after 40+ years on the cut, I'm looking for a new home for my set of 26 Lockmaster maps. They are in very good condition, having been laminated when new and contained in a large plastic wallet for storage. The set includes an Upper Trent Valley map that is no longer available from Lockmaster. They would cost over £140 new and I would welcome offers around £90 (plus P&P). If members are interested, I can be contacted on 01570 471429 or [pfellows@btinternet.com](mailto:pfellows@btinternet.com).

*Peter Fellows*

### BCN SOCIETY ICICLE CRUISE

#### BCN Society Icicle Cruise 1st—3rd March 2024.

Following the success of the early season cruise to the Fens Pools in 2023, the BCN Society have planned another short cruise for 2024.

The schedule is to meet at Merry Hill on the evening of Friday 1st March. Cruise to Parkhead Locks and up to Dudley Tunnel Portal on Saturday 2nd March. Hopefully there will be a fund raising "legging", taking a dayboat through the tunnel if consent can be obtained. Then return to Withymoore Island where there will be a bar and possibly food for Saturday evening. Disperse Sunday 3rd March.

There is no charge for this event but there will be a raffle to cover costs and raise much needed funds for the Society. For further information email Michael Smith-Keary at [sk63@btinternet.com](mailto:sk63@btinternet.com) or download the entry form from [bcnsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Icicle-cruise-2024.pdf](https://bcnsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Icicle-cruise-2024.pdf)



Bottom of Parkhead locks

Photos: Sharon Wells



### Obituary: John Laidlar

#### Sad News From Stafford Boat Club (SBC)

**Paul Chilvers** remembers an old friend

In the early hours of Thursday 16th November John Laidlar passed away peacefully at Katherine House Hospice in Stafford, just over two weeks before his 81st birthday.

John had been fighting a losing battle against cancer for the last few months, so this must be a release from the pain that he has recently been suffering. Our thoughts and condolences go to the family at this sad time.

We all know what a stalwart John has been to the club for so many years and SBC can never be the same without his support and enduring help in all things around the club - not to mention his great sense of humour at all times.

I personally will very much miss the friendship we enjoyed whilst working together in the Club Office, but at least John and Janet are now reunited again.

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